

Lizzie Overton (Enliven education) recently did a workshop for FUB, aptly titled *Teaching Good Habits of Learning*. She helped us participants to rethink the way we learn and to improve the way we can best facilitate the learning of others.

Central to the ethos of the free university movement is challenging the traditional teacher-pupil relationship, advocating a more democratic, non-hierarchical approach. Learning shouldn't be, and rarely is, one way. The workshop strengthened my belief that traditional education has largely failed us. Lizzie began by explaining how British schools have taken on the principles of the Ford car assembly line but, unsurprisingly, unlike cars, children do not come out well under this approach.

We then went on to examine the way we are taught to go about things at school, comparing the rigid and artificial methods in the classroom to the real world they will inhabit as adults. When Lizzie asked children what good learners do, they instinctively knew and this was worryingly at odds with conventional teaching. We learn better when we have the freedom to come up with our own questions, make mistakes, determine our own frameworks and tools for learning etc. It struck me that we tend to get this right at nursery and then do it all wrong when a child goes to school.

Lizzie mentioned the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy as an example of better practice. I looked up their approach. Here, children are seen as having the active role of an apprentice or researcher rather than being the more passive target of instruction. Teachers are viewed as co-learners and collaborators rather than instructors and are encouraged to facilitate the child's learning with activities based on the child's interests that they themselves engage in rather than simply sitting back and observing.

Of course, there must be a relationship between all this and the current crisis of politics that has been exciting the media recently. This week Russell Brand caused a bit of a stir on Newsnight saying the UK's political system has created a "disenfranchised, disillusioned underclass" that it fails to serve. When the topic inevitably came up again on BBC's Question Time, Owen Jones said we should abandon main stream politics (on the basis that Tories, Lib Dems and Labour are much of a muchness and have all failed us) and start our own grass-roots movement for change.

Perhaps the Reggio Emilia children will be less likely to accept the political failings that we have sadly come to. I suspect they won't need the likes of Jones and Brand telling them to wake up and start a revolution. Having been taught to set and research their own questions, I imagine they'd be less likely to let the politician and media clones set the agenda.

The slides from Teaching Good Habits of Learning can be download here

<http://bit.ly/17P7hEa>

You'll find other resources and Lizzie's contact details here

<http://enliven-ed.com/>